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ABSTRACT

The annual report describes project activities in two categories: those of the task force (governing body) and those of subprojects. The task force worked toward establishing a viable, ongoing consortium for nontraditional postsecondary education in New England and to consider other collaborative efforts for meeting regional needs. The subprojects included development of open, nonresidential courses, a faculty information conference, a conference of educational television directors, survey research on existing nontraditional programs, and survey research on the needs and characteristics of nontraditional learners. A list of project goals is appended. (MSE)

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FINAL REPORT
1974-1975

NEW ENGLAND OPEN LEARNING PROJECT

THE NEW ENGLAND CENTER FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION
garrison avenue, durham, new hampshire 03824
(603) 862-1900

September, 1975

new england open learning project

FINAL REPORT

1974-75

M. Daniel Smith, Coordinator

Project activities fall into two categories: activities of the Task Force (the governing body) and sub-project activities. The Task Force, whose membership is given in Appendix A, met frequently to work out a viable ongoing consortium structure for non-traditional post-secondary education, and to consider collaborative efforts for meeting needs of the region. Several sub-projects were initiated by the Task Force as well, including development of open non-residential courses, a faculty information conference, a conference of educational television directors, survey research on existing non-traditional programs, and survey research on the needs and characteristics of non-traditional learners.

Task Force Activities: After debating the advisability of a seventh institution (a "New England Open University") the Task Force recommended to the Presidents that non-traditional post-secondary activities continue to be embedded in existing administrative and academic structures and processes. The Task Force then went on to identify goals and sub-goals for the future (see Appendix B) and to discuss alternative formats for the project in the future. Recommendations were forwarded to the six Presidents, including possible alternatives for governance of the project. The Presidents ultimately chose the alternative which assigned

responsibility for this project to the Joint Operations Committee, consisting of the six Academic Vice Presidents. It is difficult to report fully on the debates and discussions which occupied the Task Force in its many meetings; the results speak for themselves.

Support Office Activities: The Support Office operated with a small staff (half-time coordinator, full-time administrative secretary) to minimize central administrative costs, in order to devote a high proportion of available funds to activities involving the six participating institutions. The office carried out assignments from the Task Force, including research, course development, conferences, and planning for Task Force meetings, and budgetary supervision and disbursement. Prior to the decision of the Presidents regarding future governance, the coordinator drafted a proposal to the Fund; this was based on the recommendations of the Task Force to the Presidents, but simplified committee structures to fit a budget in line with available funding. This proposal received support from the Fund to the amount of $33,000. First year activities were extended by the Fund through the summer of 1975 on the first year budget, and the new grant was scheduled to begin in September of 1975. The decision of the Presidents regarding future governance was communicated by the coordinator to the Fund before final decisions on the proposal were made, as evidence that the project had been integrated into the mainstream of academic life of the six institutions.

A cost evaluation of the sub-projects initiated is attached, Appendix C. A description of the sub-projects coordinated by the Support Office follows:

1. Non-traditional course development: Open Learning course development by teams of faculty members from the six participating institutions was initiated in the areas of Child Psychology, Nutrition, Computers for Management, Writing Skills, and Learning Disabilities. (Work in Computers for Management and in Writing Skills was terminated during the fall, for reasons described below.) These open university

type courses were seen as a means of increasing service to non-traditional learners without capital investments in classrooms and other permanent facilities.

Accessing regional audiences was envisioned as a means of attaining cost effectiveness: extrapolations from enrollments and populations of other such programs suggest a probable total enrollment of four thousand in a regional New England curriculum involving a degree, and about four hundred in an isolated course of this type (the latter is extrapolated from "Ascent of Man" enrollments).

Inter-campus faculty teams were formed so that review and sanction of content of materials would be achieved, and thus regional acceptability. It was recognized that the actual course development would require smaller groups working on one or a few campuses.

One objective was to develop open home-based courses without writing new texts or creating new television programs from films, utilizing instead existing materials and putting them together in economical teaching/learning systems. It was assumed and stated that the courses would ultimately be administered by continuing education organizations in each state, though monitored and delivered through a regional system.

At this time the courses are just beginning to mature to the point where problems of delivery systems and accessing non-traditional students are becoming primary. Field tests have been very limited, but will be more extensive in the fall and spring. Progress has been slow partly because the faculty involved are doing this as overload and without compensation, and because they are unfamiliar with the requirements for this kind of development. However, at this level of funding it is the best that could be expected, and it functions as a faculty training vehicle as well.

a. Psychology of the Child: Membership and correspondence are given in Appendix D. The team has revised the original Maine course, which featured

behavioral objectives and multiple choice questions for each objective, and are in the process of making it more suitable for "teaching at a distance." Some field testing was done at Rhode Island, and of course the fact that the basic course was already available (through previous development activities at Maine) gave this project a significant start.

b. Computers for Management: This team had three members, due to attrition over the summer of 1974 while the funded project was getting under way. One member of the team contracted to do the main part of the gathering of courseware (tests, films, video-tapes and such) and putting them together into an integrated course, to be approved by the other members. The task proved to be more difficult and time consuming than that faculty member had expected: pressures of teaching and lack of encouragement from the existing reward system resulted in abandonment of the project. (Other team members had indicated that they did not want to assume the task themselves.) Of course, this started from scratch, and with a less-than-full regional representation. The kind of search and review and course design work that it required proved to be different from traditional faculty functions, and more difficult than anticipated. (Central full-time clerical and technical services can probably provide the same search and review functions on a more economical basis.)

c. Writing Skills: The leader of the team found there was too much competition from other pressures and requirements on him, and was unable to continue. Some of the teaching problems inherent in teaching writing "at a distance" began to appear to be difficult to surmount, as well. The coordinator operated through the leaders chosen by the teams, feeling that it was better to be non-directive and provide as much or as little support as requested. In this case, no other members of the team were contacted to determine whether they wished to take over the leadership, and this may have been an erroneous omission.

d. Nutrition: When team efforts in (b) and (c) faltered, an alternate project was initiated by the coordinator, involving a previously developed course in Nutrition at the University of Maine (it had been considered earlier by the Task Force, but was by-passed to attain wider geographical involvement.) A six-university faculty team was identified and it met in January to discuss the contents and processes of a regional, non-traditional version of the course. This team showed great energy and productivity, and the course -- made up of units revised and edited and in some cases rewritten by the participants from five of the six universities -- is being edited and put together in final form at the University of Maine for field trials in the fall or spring with non-residential adult students. More information on this project is found in Appendix E.

e. Learning Disabilities: The coordinator, finding work on course development progressing slowly, began to explore some of the problems of delivery systems both generally and in respect to his own course in Learning Disabilities. Through a graduate assistant, he produced a general prototype of a student guide for such courses involving processes related to television programs, films, learning centers, tests, and the problems of learning "on your own." This was sent to the other course teams, and is presented here in Appendix F. Then a version of this guide specifically involving content in Learning Disabilities was developed for trial in the spring.

f. Collection of Data on Films, Audio-Tapes, Video-Tapes and Television Programs: The difficulties experienced by the Computers for Management team in locating courseware and integrating them into a system, led the coordinator to devote funds through part-time help to the collection of information on audio-visual materials which exist for use in these various courses. This is a very time consuming process. The results of which are presented in Appendix G and H, as partial lists of the materials relevant to various courses under development.

2. Faculty Information and Discussion Conference on Non-Traditional Post-Secondary Education: A faculty conference on non-traditional post-secondary education was held at the New England Center for Continuing Education in May. It was sponsored and planned jointly by representatives of the Merrimack Valley Branch of the University of New Hampshire, the College Entrance Examination Board, the School of Continuing Studies at the University of New Hampshire, and the Open Learning Project. Arrangements for the conference were made by the Program Support Office, through Task Force representatives on each of the six campuses. Using a small part of the grant funds, four faculty members from each of the participating institutions were invited to attend with conference and travel expenses paid. Each University was invited to send more representatives at its own expense. Task Force members (or in some cases, academic vice presidents) were asked to select faculty members who were relatively traditional in their outlook on higher education and who had some status with their colleagues. Attendance was limited to faculty members. At the same time, resource persons were identified from the faculties of innovative post-secondary programs in New England (Vermont Community College, University Without Walls, College III at Massachusetts, Framingham State College) as well as from Empire State College in New York. Academic administrators of these programs were asked to select faculty who had traditional credentials but who had made a change to non-traditional teaching. Three non-traditional adult students, one from Vermont Community College and two from the School of Continuing Studies at the University of New Hampshire were also invited.

Two weeks before the conference the Program Support Office mailed a set of excerpts from articles on non-traditional post-secondary education to each participant, to give them an initial concept of this new field. Then on Friday night before the Saturday discussions the group convened to hear an address by Professor Cyril Houle of the University of Chicago. Professor Houle outlined a

compelling rationale for concern over the future of higher education generally and for non-traditional approaches in general. The main part of the conference, coming on Saturday, involved small group discussions among traditional faculty. Non-traditional resource persons acted as informants and gave opinions where appropriate. Before breaking into small groups, all participants met in general session to identify important topics for discussion in order to give some initial direction to these small group discussions which were to follow. In the afternoon the entire group convened to hear reports from the groups and discuss their implications. An analysis of the reports was circulated to participants, the Task Force, and Joint Operations Committee. It is given in Appendix I.

Generally, it reflects high concern regarding this new field by faculty, some doubts as to the validity of predictions and a feeling of need to be presented with the original data themselves, some strong feelings regarding the fundamental and primary role of faculty in the development of non-traditional programs, and a range of views as to best ways of accessing faculty and bringing them into the mainstream of development.

3. Conference of Directors of Educational Television Networks: At the suggestion of the director of the New Hampshire Network, and with the consent of the Task Force, funds were reserved for a conference of directors of educational television in New England, to explore the problems and possibilities of cooperative endeavors (with the Open Learning Project) in the field of non-traditional post-secondary education. Representatives of the Open University of Great Britain, Chicago Television College, and State University of Nebraska (now University of Mid-America) presented samples of credit courses involving television. A discussion was held in which the directors voiced concern over being left out of the planning and development process. The directors ultimately delegated responsibility for continued liaison and cooperation to Mr. Howard Spergel of the Eastern Educational

Television Network. Mr. Spergel visited the project subsequently and suggested strongly that broadcast television producers be included in course development teams from their inception, in the future. Some efforts were made to involve educational television personnel in subsequent meetings of course development teams, but the preoccupation of the faculty members of those teams with immediate problems of content and philosophy and with working out cooperative arrangements for revising units and such prevented a meaningful interchange at this time.

4. Survey Research on Non-Traditional Post-Secondary Programs in New England: One of the first tasks assigned to the Program Support Office by the Task Force was to survey existing non-traditional programs in New England and report on them. A copy of that research report accompanies this final project report.

5. Survey Research on the Needs and Interests of Non-Traditional Life-Long Learners: Early in the life of the project the Task Force debated at some length the advisability of committing funds to a needs and market assessment survey. There was some disagreement over the value of such an effort, in the face of other surveys and so it was not initiated at that time. However, during the spring of 1975, after the recommendations had been submitted to the Presidents and the proposal to the Fund had been sent, the coordinator decided to ask the administrative secretary to carry out a review of all existing surveys relevant to this area and to compile the results. A copy of that research report accompanies this final project report.

Evaluation of Project Outcomes: The original proposal for this project envisioned evaluation based on learning outcomes of courses developed, converted to units compatible with traditional input measures (hours, dollars, etc.). Course development under the greatly reduced funding did not reach non-traditional learners

during the first year, but some effort was spent researching various sources for guidelines to the original evaluation plan. Publications by WICHE-NCHEMS and Systems Research Incorporated were relevant, also papers by Wagner in the journal, Higher Education, concerning comparative costs of the Open University and traditional universities. A report by Farmer and Trask entitled, Outcome Measures for Community and Junior Colleges (November, 1974, Systems Research) presented an approach which might be helpful in future project evaluations: among the "impact descriptors" mentioned by them are cognitive knowledge (grade point average, successful course completions), non-cognitive knowledge (scale of study habits), personal growth (scale or areas and agents of change), social growth (scale of feeling about others), image development (scale of satisfaction with college), and autotelic activity (no measure - this is related to the ability of the student to function independently). Also of interest here is a survey of the interests of various people and groups involved in higher education in a variety of possible outcome measures. This report, by S. Mizek and W. Arney of WICHE-NCHEMS, was published in November of 1974 under the title, The Higher Education Outcome Measures Identification Study. The results of the survey, in terms of opinions regarding the need for and availability of data on outcomes in a number of areas, is intended to serve as a benchmark for determining hypotheses regarding outcome measures and for future planning and management. The outcomes which were presented for reactions by those contacted in the survey were the following (each had ten or more criterion measures under it):

Student Knowledge and Skills Development
Student Educational Career Development
Student Educational Satisfaction
Student Occupational Career Development
Student Personel Development
Student Social/Cultural Development
Community Educational Development
Community Service
Community Impact
Development of New Knowledge and Art

This report would be worth consulting in planning future outcomes measures for this project, since it suggests a great number of possible techniques for assessment as well as giving a range of opinions concerning their usefulness and availability.

In terms of the original objective of finding units of output compatible with those for input, one could develop some hypotheses along the "value added" line of thinking used by economists in general studies of higher education, applying them to particular curricula and courses. It would require a type of thinking about education which is relatively foreign to academe, however.

Since such work has not been possible, and because a large part of project activity went into forming a consortium structure and into experimental course development, the present evaluation of the first year of the project can best be presented in terms of problems experienced, with recommended approaches to their solution. Since the Task Force has been replaced and has not met for some time, this subjective assessment falls to the coordinator, and should be treated as his opinion and not necessarily that of the Task Force or its individual members.

Conclusions and Recommendations of General Interest:

1. Interest Groups: A basic problem is achieving integration of groups interested in non-traditional post-secondary education, in order to incorporate their standards and expertise into the final result. These groups include high administration (presidents, academic vice presidents, and more recently chancellors), middle administrators (deans, department chairman), faculty (and disciplines within faculties), directors of continuing education, educational television broadcasters, directors of campus media centers, and non-traditional students. Balanced representation of all of these groups would have aided progress during the first year, and the coordinator has recommended such a balance in the future. "Middle

administrators" exerted a negative influence in certain cases by discouraging faculty participation in course development. Educational television and campus media people expressed concern (both directly and indirectly) over not being part of the development process, as did faculty members at the spring conference. Generally, it would be most productive if the conditions of participation required a consensus on policy activities. This would assure consideration of the concerns and needs and standards of all groups in the final program, in relation to such diverse matters as cost effectiveness, quality of subject matter, relevance of courses for students, technical quality of broadcast and text material, attractiveness to students, and ease of access for students.

2. Useful Support Services: Services which seem most needed and most economically provided on a regional basis are:

a. Research on needs of learners, costs of courses and curricula, costs and technical problems of new delivery systems.

b. Location and review and costing of courseware for non-traditional courses: films, television programs, tapes, alternate texts, and such. The best sources for these are comprehensive catalogues (re subject matter), and the work of locating and reviewing them is done more economically by non-faculty personnel serving a number of disciplines at once, although the final reviews and reports should be supervised by graduate students or assistant professors.

c. Staff support for working committees as well as for the governing board; the Task Force did not make noticeable progress until the Program Support Office was funded and agendas could be planned and background information provided for the meetings.

d. Budgetary and disbursing processes.

e. Central processing and recording and dissemination of information on courses and credits and degrees: this is a function not undertaken by the present project, but one which could be handled effectively and economically by a central office. Such centralization would contribute to the accessibility and relevance of continuing education, by providing a clearing house for comparative and complete information on all programs and encouraging transfers of credits and flexibility of residence, where present programs of this type are adequate on paper but are not sufficiently open and accessible and well publicized.

3. "Selling" Non-Traditional Post-Secondary Education: Regardless of the increasing need of society and of life-long learners for non-traditional post-secondary education, it will still have to be "sold" if it is to be "consumed." Experience from this project and the research done on the adult education market by the Support Office suggest the following:

a. Loans and scholarships must be made available, either through legislation or foundation support or contributions "in kind" from the universities themselves.

b. Faculty need several kinds of assistance and support in meeting changing needs, including demonstrations of techniques for teaching and evaluating non-traditional learners, demographic data from which to predict future changes for themselves (rather than being told how things are going to go), and inter- and cross-disciplinary conferences for discussing new roles and functions.

c. Assessment of both formal and experiential learning and external degree programs, require sensitive, valid evaluation processes. This is one of the most important and least emphasized aspects of non-traditional post-secondary education, particularly in respect to traditional disciplines and prior formal

learning (non-traditional experiential learning assessment is being explored vigorously). This is also the area where administrators make the broadest and most erroneous assumptions about the quality of existing programs, and where faculty members fail most completely in confronting the realities and requirements of the situation.

d. Open teaching-at-a-distance courses in relevant subjects for large regional audiences promise to be the most economical and satisfactory approach to curriculum in the long run, despite short-run barriers of various kinds; more personalized approaches such as found in present external degree programs and in assessment of experiential learning are attractive and pedagogically ideal, but their per student costs should be examined carefully and compared with alternatives.

4. Open University Type Course Development: Faculty members from various campuses have worked well together so far, and differences of point of view have been a problem in only one case. Faculty have generally been preoccupied with subject matter content, however, and have been slow to face the problems of teaching at a distance, as it differs from traditional classroom teaching processes. Difficulties in locating and reviewing films, video-tapes, audio-tapes, television programs and supplementary texts has been a major barrier, and was a major factor in the abandonment of the "Computers for Management" sub-project. Lack of close involvement of television and media people in course development and difficulty in communication between them and faculty have also been evident. Workshops need to be held for faculty who contemplate participation in such course development, involving those who have already participated and also faculty from the British Open University and from the University of Mid-America.

5. Problems of Synthesizing Media and Materials: The piecemeal nature of television network coverage in each state, and the piecemeal assignment of areas

for continuing education, are barriers to economical state and regional teaching at a distance processes. The use of standard educational films over educational television is a new concept, and needs to be worked out with the parties involved.

Establishment of learning centers, and providing them with course materials, is another problem. Incorporation of films and television and audio-tapes into courses is a problem, in that faculty members are not used to considering the relative contributions of each of these and are more accustomed to filling in what is needed through lectures. Again, the problem of reviewing (pre-viewing) existing materials is a major one also.

5. The Need For and Potential Of a Regional Facility for Non-Traditional Post-Secondary Education: In a time of retrenchment and austerity any collaborative project or program comes under cost scrutiny, whether existing or proposed. Experience with this project suggests, however, that there would be real advantages to and a significant role for a facility for the development of non-traditional post-secondary education. This would be embedded in the governance of the six institutions, and would support activities and developments on individual campuses. However, it would also extend the outreach and service functions of the land-grant universities beyond those campuses to the entire region, and would thereby be able to provide a greater variety and quality of services at lower cost. This facility should incorporate characteristics of the National Training Laboratories on the one hand, and of the Continuing Education Program of Educational Testing Service on the other. NTL has extended operations in organizational behavior and change to university problems, while ETS has extended its concern for evaluation and testing into the field of non-traditional learning. A synthesis of these two is not only feasible, but represents an appropriate profile for a project in life-long learning. Its NTL-side would attend to the personal needs of non-traditional

learners and to internal problems of change, through intense learning experiences for faculty and administrators; its ETS-side would attend to the need for careful and high quality assessment and evaluation of prior learning (for external degree programs) and of learning acquired in innovative courses and curricula. Ideally, this dual approach would be supplemented by a component involving instructional systems development as well, characteristic of both the University of Mid-America and of the Open University of Great Britain (and of the non-media functions of Maine's Instructional Systems Center). By involving institutions and organizations beyond the six sponsoring universities, this facility could develop a self-supporting program which would enable it to provide broader and higher quality services to the six sponsors at very low cost. (The ability of such a facility to attract funds would also be a factor in its development.) It would continue to be governed by a representative advisory group, and administration of courses and curricula would be handled through the existing continuing education organizations of the sponsoring universities. Its main function would be the provision of education, research, and leadership to promote the development of non-traditional post-secondary education.

APPENDIX A

Composition of 1974-75 Task Force

University of Connecticut - Galvin Gall, Dean, Extended and Continuing Education; Foster Lindley, Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences: University of Maine - Franklyn P. Eggert, Dean, Graduate School; Mary Ann Haas, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs: University of Massachusetts - Hedwig M. Veith, Staff Assistant, Office of the President; William C. Venman, Director, Continuing Education Division: University of New Hampshire - Maynard Heckel, Dean, School of Continuing Studies; M. Daniel Smith, Associate Professor of Education: University of Rhode Island - Edward Pauley, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs (on sabbatical in Britain - January 1975); Thomas Pezzullo, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs; George Dillavou, Dean, Division of University Extension: University of Vermont - H. Lawrence McCrorey, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs; Raymond V. Phillips, Dean, Continuing Education: Joint Operations Committee, New England State Universities - Donald E. Nicoll, Chairman: New England Center for Continuing Education - Harry P. Day, Director; Mary Lou Hunter, Administrative Assistant.

APPENDIX B

New England Open Learning Project

GOALS

GOAL I

To extend or expand the educational outreach and services of the participating institutions to populations of learners not now served adequately.

Sub-Goals Related To This:

To lower barriers to access to post-secondary education posed by lack of available time (due to demands of jobs or families or other responsibilities), lack of money, or lack of the educational background traditionally required.

To re-interest disaffected students.

To provide a "second chance" educational opportunity for adults with a high school diploma or more to obtain additional education in spite of barriers to traditional programs.

GOAL II

To extend, restructure, or add to curricula, delivery systems, support services, teaching, and evaluation, to serve people better relative to the changing educational needs of the individual learner and of society.

Sub-Goals Related To This:

To develop knowledge, abilities, and concepts which enable people to cope with major societal and environmental changes occurring or about to occur.

To foster learning for personal satisfaction, awareness, and growth, and for increased professional competence and personal capabilities.

To promote transmission of knowledge for learning in the home and in community settings.

To assist faculty and administrators in adapting to the different requirements of non-traditional, life-long learning, as well as to create a climate which promotes positive attitudes toward such education by both groups.

To explore and overcome problems associated with the assessment and evaluation of traditional and non-traditional learning, including life and work experience, in order to draw on a greater variety of sources and types of learning.

GOAL III

To achieve more effective and efficient use of institutional resources.

Sub-Goals Related To This:

To facilitate and foster more effective and efficient support services, including information dissemination, assistance in obtaining credit for previous traditional and non-traditional learning, assistance in obtaining financial help and in finding programs which combine with regular jobs, and counseling regarding individual capabilities and their application to various post-secondary programs.

To provide new roles and functions for faculty and administrators in the face of projected stable or shrinking traditional student populations and in face of changing student needs and demands.

To improve reward structures and promotion and tenure processes to encourage faculty involvement in open learning.

To facilitate the recording and transfer of credit.

To relate and articulate post-secondary education acquired in community and junior colleges, vocational-technical institutions, private colleges and universities, proprietary institutions, and business and industry programs, to programs in participating institutions.

To investigate and compare the cost-effectiveness of traditional and non-traditional post-secondary education, in order to identify the most productive features of each and to suggest new combinations for the future.